

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

news release

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ANDRUS STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF ALASKAN WILDLIFE TO LOWER 48 STATES AND OTHER NATIONS

America's sportsmen have a vital stake in decisions being made this year classifying the Federal lands in Alaska, Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus said today.

"If we have the vision and courage to protect the vital ecosystems of Alaska, we will be maintaining a life-giving reservoir to support a rich array of wildlife for decades and centuries to come," Andrus told the Third International Waterfowl Symposium in New Orleans. "We will enhance the likelihood that our children and their children will have the opportunity to experience the joy associated with ducks and other waterfowl which migrate southward each fall."

The Secretary was referring to the estimated 13 million waterfowl which migrate from Alaska annually.

Andrus said the Administration's proposal to place almost 92 million acres in national parks, wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers, and national forests is the minimum essential to conserve the scenic and wildlife resources of Alaska.

"Our proposal is not an inflated estimate," Andrus emphasized. "Our proposal for Alaska is a bottom-line request."

Congress must make a decision on the classification of the Federal lands by the end of this year if it is to meet the deadline set in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Andrus termed the Department's proposal for 92 million acres "probably the best researched recommendations for protected areas" ever sent to Congress by an Interior Secretary. He said proposals allow ample opportunity for needed mineral and energy development in Alaska.

Addressing the international aspects of the symposium, Andrus said:

"The greatest act of international cooperation and goodwill the United States could take this year would be for the Congress to enact the Alaskan land provisions as proposed by the Administration. Waterfowl and other wildlife in Alaska migrate to every continent and virtually every corner of the world."

The Secretary also emphasized the need for preservation of wetlands and other wildlife habitat in the Lower 48 states.

Andrus said that provisions to compensate for loss of wildlife habitat must become a part of the planning process for all Federal projects.

"It is my strong feeling that provisions for mitigation should be included in authorizing legislation, and that the mitigation should be accomplished simultaneously with construction of a project," Andrus said.